KANSAS INFANT-TODDLER SERVICES

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BULLETIN

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Guidelines for Evaluating Transitions

An essential, but often neglected, element of transition planning is evaluation. Evaluation assesses the outcomes of transition planning and the responsiveness of the people who guide the transition process. Evaluation benefits all transition partners by:

- learning whether federal and state guidelines were followed;
- determining whether the local plan and time line were followed;
- gauging the satisfaction of various transition participants;
- gathering suggestions to improve future transitions, because they are critical components of the community's comprehensive service system.

Evaluation and reflection upon its results are necessary if transitions are to become positive milestones for children and families. Transitions may be evaluated at the:

- system level (i.e., all participants and potential participants in transition);
- program level (i.e., single agency within the Infant-Toddler network, but not whole network or school district or other partners);
- family level (i.e., the experience of a single family in traversing a given transition under study).

Ideally, all three levels of transition should be evaluated but, perhaps, some levels more formally than others. Resources, including time, determine the scope of an evaluation in any given year. Here is how to proceed:

1. **Focus the question.** Many questions might be asked, but participants have time to answer only a few. Consider the following, which are relevant to the age 3 transition between Infant-Toddler Services and Part B Preschool Programs.

    - Were Part B program staff notified in a timely manner about every child potentially eligible for preschool services?
    - Were transition meetings convened in a timely manner in all cases?
    - Did representatives from the families, Infant-Toddler Services, and Part B program attend every transition meeting?

- Did every transition meeting review the child's program options and consider the many program possibilities for the period from the child's third birthday through the remainder of the school year, or before that date, if the birthdays were in the summer?
- Was an individualized transition plan included in every IFSP?
- Did the transition plan include the following, and was each element then translated into action?

  A. Discussions with, training of, or instruction for parents regarding due process rights and future services, and other matters related to the child's transition;
  B. Procedures to prepare the child for changes in service delivery, including steps to help the child adjust to and function in a new setting;
  C. Transmission of information about the child to the Part B program, with parental consent, in writing, including evaluation and assessment information and copies of IFSPs that have been developed and implemented;
  D. Identification and definition of the financial responsibilities of all appropriate agencies;
  E. A strategy to avoid unnecessary testing, to share current assessment information between programs and to perform any additional assessments needed;
  F. An IFSP or IEP to guide the child's development from age 3 to age 4;
  G. The assurance of the uninterrupted provision of appropriate services to the child, including during the summer months, as appropriate.

- Did every eligible child begin services with FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education) on or before the third birthday?
- Did families have access to sufficient information in various formats across time in order to make important decisions?
- If warranted to support each child and family in transition, did communication continue between sending and receiving program staff after the child moved to new services?
- Were families truly included in all aspects of their child's transition?
- Is there a comprehensive local transition plan?
- How satisfied was each participant with the implementation of the plan?
- In what ways is the local plan inadequate, and how should it be changed?

2. Design the evaluation to answer a few key questions.

- Define the sources of evidence: interviews, questionnaires, postcard responses, records of meetings, surveys. Collect no more information than will be used.
- Decide who will be evaluated and by whom.
- Decide when information will be gathered.
- Choose the evaluation tool or tools, depending upon your questions, the characteristics of people in your community, and the people who will use the tools.

3. Collect, organize, and analyze the data.

4. **Share your findings in a manner that will lead to improved services.**

- Information must be communicated to potential users. Anyone responsible for any element of your community's transition plan should receive the information.
- Reports should address issues that users perceive to be important. Tell people how they can improve future transitions.
- Reports must be delivered in a timely manner and in a form that is easily understood by intended users. Always include the following:

  A. A brief executive summary;
  B. One or more clear graphics (sufficiently labeled) to convey core information;
  C. A list of recommendations, or a list questions for further discussion, that arise from the data.

- Both oral (and perhaps more detailed) written reports are valuable.

5. **Schedule at least one interagency meeting per year to review your community's transition plan and make necessary changes.**

- Keep the focus on children and families.
- Celebrate successes.
- Use the challenging situations to stimulate community problem-solving and improvement.

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